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NEWS RELEASE

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West Nile Virus Reported in Owyhee County Horse

West Nile virus has been reported in an unvaccinated horse in Owyhee County, the first report of the mosquito borne virus in that southwest Idaho county. So far this year, West Nile virus has been reported in horse, bird or human populations in the Idaho counties of Ada, Bingham, Canyon, Elmore, Gem, Gooding, Payette, Twin Falls and Washington.

“Even though fall weather approaches people should not let down their guard as mosquitoes are still active in many parts of Idaho,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Deputy State Epidemiologist for the Department of Health and Welfare. “It is important for everyone in our state to protect themselves and ‘Fight the Bite’ from mosquitoes that spread West Nile virus.”

People and animals are infected by West Nile virus through the bite of an infected mosquito. People cannot contract the virus from casual contact with an infected animal or person. The virus is spread by migrating infected birds, which are bitten by mosquitoes. The infected mosquitoes can then pass the virus on to people and other animals.

Dr. Tengelsen says that approximately 80 percent of people infected with West Nile virus do not feel sick. Others may experience a mild, flu-like illness. Common symptoms of infection include headaches, body aches and a mild fever. Occasionally the virus can lead to serious illness requiring hospitalization, especially in people over the age of 50.

People can take the following precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites:

- Insect-proof your home by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on your property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Report dead birds to your local District Health Department or Fish and Game office.

(more)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1,865 people have tested positive for West Nile virus in the United States in 2004, resulting in 59 human deaths. Arizona and California account for over half of the West Nile human infections reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this year.

Horses and certain groups of birds, including crows, magpies, ravens, jays and raptors, are often severely affected by West Nile virus. There is not a vaccine available for people and animals, with the exception of a vaccine for horses. Approximately one-third of unvaccinated horses that are infected with West Nile virus die, so horse owners are strongly encouraged to contact their veterinarian for more information on the horse vaccine.

For health information about West Nile virus, please contact your district health department, or visit Health and Welfare's website at: www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has useful information about West Nile virus at: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm. For information about protecting your horse, contact your local veterinarian, or visit the Department of Agriculture website at www.agri.idaho.gov. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has helpful West Nile information at: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/manage_issues/wnv/surveillance.cfm

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